

THE MATRIARCHS

by

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THE MATRIARCHS

a three-act play

CHARACTERS (in order of their appearance)

The Mourners: Group I - Madge, Flo, Jennie
Group II- Charlie, Ralph
Group III-Connie, Harriet, Frank, Phil

Theresa - Oldest of five sisters; religious fanatic
Josephine - Second oldest; widow; Lillian's mother
Maggie - Middle sister, married to Artie; Pat's mother
Artie - 60-ish businessman married to Maggie; Pat's father
Pat - Twenty-three; daughter of Artie & Maggie;unmarried
Lucille - Second youngest married to Joe; Carole's mother
Joe - Agency head married to Lucille; Carole's father
Carole - Seventeen; daughter of Lucille & Joe
Elizabeth - Youngest sister married to Dick; Julia's mother
Dick - Government worker married to Elizabeth; Julia's father
Julia - Twenty-seven, unmarried; temporarily unemployed; daughter of Liz and Dick
David Lerner - About 30, Jewish; Joe's associate
Lillian - Early 30's; unmarried; Josephine's daughter
Vince - Pat's fiance

SETS

The funeral home
The sisters' 'homes'
The 'altar'

TIME

The Present

ACT ONE

SCENE I

Scene: Reception Room of funeral parlor. Walls heavily draped. There are two entrances: one, downstage right and one upstage left. Near upstage right entrance, drapes part to indicate recess where bier, unseen by audience, is set. Several settees, chairs and benches face recess.

Time: The present.

At Rise: The stage is in semi-darkness, illuminated by glow of candles from the recess. Mourners, some seated, others standing, are motionless. There is a funereal silence, until the lights begin gradually to come up and the silence is broken first by whispers, then smothered laughter, as the characters unfreeze.

Marge- (Group I)

I get these nagging headaches every morning. Can't seem to sleep nights. Toss and turn, toss and turn. I've tried everything.

Flo

Could be you need hormones.

Marge

God knows what they'll do to me. My husband will divorce me one of these days on grounds of cruelty in bed.
(Hand-over-mouth giggles)

Flo

My niece Joan -

(Looks around)

She's not here yet - she drinks beer. Says it puts her right to sleep. Come to think of it, that kid of hers is much too happy to be a product of that family. She probably spoons some of the stuff into his formula.

Charlie - (Group II)

So the dope bunts, and they're four runs behind in the eighth. Stengel don't even know when to let him swing away...

Jennie -(Group I)

Imagine charging two dollars and thirty-five cents for that tough piece of steak...

Madge

It's robbery. Why Alice's butcher only charges her...oh, there's Theresa.

(They turn toward recess where the elder Theresa has just come in from the upstage right entrance. She falls to her knees and begins to chant Hail Marys'. We see Josephine come from within to aid her sister.)

Josephine's been sitting there for hours. Have any of the other sisters made an appearance?

(Looks at wrist watch)

Flo

All three will probably come marching in to the strains of "Pomp and Circumstance." Very properly, of course. Poor Anthony! So overshadowed by women. A houseful--five sisters, no less.

Ralph- (Group II)

I'm telling you, my car does 24 on a gallon...

Charlie

Oh, come off it, no American car over six cylinders manages more than sixteen.

Ralph

Sez who?

Jennie- (Group I)

I can't figure out where they got the money to go to Europe. My husband makes more than he does and we can't afford...

Flo

Have you ever been to their home for dinner?

Jennie

Well, no...

Frank (Group III)

Was Anthony younger or older than Josephine?

Harriet

Only God knows. Stuck in among five sisters like that.
Hell, Little Tony, the 'man' of the family!

(Laughs, and is shushed)

Connie

I understand his ma was so busy with his sisters that he
was left to shift for himself. Can you imagine a lone
boy in all that confusion?

(Groups have begun to mingle)

Ralph

He's getting more attention now than he ever got in life.

(Lights up on downstage entrance. A stir
indicates entrance of large group. Everyone
in room turns expectantly)

Harriet

There's Maggie...her hair gets lighter every time I see her...

(Maggie enters, followed by Artie and Pat)

and there's Artie and Pat. I don't see Pat's boyfriend.
Shouldn't he be with her?

Connie

Vince, you mean? She probably sent him away for good.

Marge

No such luck for Pat. Her mother wouldn't stand for it.

(Members of each family file past relatives
and step into recess, where they kneel)

Connie

I see Lucille was well enough to make the drive from out
the island...

(Lucille enters, followed by Joe and Carole)

There's Carole...

Harriet

She's pretty.

Connie

But no personality. Too shy. I'm surprised Lucille hasn't coached her in the feminine wiles.

Harriet

Give her time. She'll learn plenty before she's eighteen. Nowadays they know everything before their first lipstick, not after their first baby.

Connie

Speak for yourself.

Harriet

All right. Second baby.

(Elizabeth and Dick enter, with daughter
Julia trailing a few steps behind)

Do you know that Elizabeth and Dick have never yet been down to Florida. He has some insignificant job with the city, while brothers-in-law Artie and Joe are both in business and rolling in dough. I'm sure Elizabeth isn't too happy about such a state of affairs...Well, here's Julia, the third, single female cousin in a row. What a monotonous family!

Jennie

Good figure. Attractive, but with none of Elizabeth's finesse.

Madge

And she's getting close to thirty.

Frank

Where's Lillian?

Phil

Lillian?

Frank

You know, Josephine's daughter.

Phil

Oh yes, the neurotic one. She's either dieting or eating nesselrode pie...Here they come.

(There are levels of importance at funerals. As Lucille, Elizabeth and Maggie enter into the reception room with their families, minor relatives align themselves in order of importance, not without a few skirmishes as to place, to offer their condolences. The three sisters nod acceptance: Elizabeth stiffly, with an affected air of importance; Maggie dabs at her eyes; Lucille just looks ill. The husbands shrug uneasily, in recognition of the inevitability of the event. Pat, Julia and Carole withdraw from their parents and band together. A circle of relatives, within which the husbands are assimilated, forms about each sister. Josephine, unnoticed, takes a cup of coffee from the coffee table upstage and sits down quietly, apart from the others. Theresa is still kneeling at the bier.)

Ad libs

...was so shocked. Anthony was such a nice man...

...we all have our crosses to bear...

...no warning! It must have been terribly...

...I'll bet he was still a virgin...

(Sudden freeze of characters. The mouths are still working, but no sound is heard. Lights dim and spot picks up the entrance of David Lerner, at downstage entrance. He steps into the room, looks toward mourners, then toward audience, and continues toward recess, which he does not enter. He does not kneel or make the sign of the cross, but stands with head bowed for a moment. He then turns and goes back into the reception room, pauses briefly as he regards the assembled relatives, then walks toward the apron of the stage where he talks to the audience.

David Lerner

Sad, isn't it? Their only brother.
(Peers at audience)

David

I haven't introduced myself yet - I'm David Lerner.
Eventually I will be a partner in Joe's office.

(Nods head in Joe's direction)

He doesn't know it. I'm paying my respects, although I
never met this Tony. You know how it is in business.

(Waits a few seconds for manifestations of
uneasiness or coughing)

I don't know if you're paying any attention to me but I
certainly can hear you.

(Turns in toward centerstage)

Those 'ladies' and 'you' ladies. You sniffle shrilly and
you talk shrilly and you think in high C. You and they...

(Indicates audience and stage females)

the women of America.

(Pauses for emphasis)

Those sisters. The big three there in particular. Do you
know they're under the delusion that they're suffering
over their brother's death. Honestly. You want to know how
sad they were twenty-four hours ago? Yesterday?

Let's turn back the clock and see.

(The stage slowly darkens to blackout. Spot
picks out a dressing table with a mirror,
a small library bookshelf and a TV set, facing
away from audience, playing Late Show theme music.
Julia, slouching, is reading. Elizabeth, in
front of the mirror, is applying a face cream and
Dick is watching the TV show.)

Julia

(Looking up from book)

I wonder whether Uncle Anthony left a will. Probably not.
He always gave away everything.

Dick

Ssh. I'm trying to hear.

Julia

I thought one didn't go in for entertainment when there was
a death in the family. Or was that way back in the
Dark Ages?

Dick

Your mother has no objections. Why should you?

Elizabeth

(To Julia)

Why don't you put your hair up and get to bed. And use
little curls.

Julia

I'm not going anywhere.

Elizabeth

Look, I don't want you to look like a mess at the wake in front of my relatives.

Julia

Little curls will make a difference?

Elizabeth

And wear your grey suit. You look like an old maid in black...and...if anybody should ask, you don't have to mention you lost your job again. Just say you're still on that furniture magazine.

Dick

Who's going to ask?..And does she have to report?

Elizabeth

It might come up. Everybody expects her to be running the magazine by this time, with all her big talk. Just because some overenthusiastic high school teacher liked one of your compositions you've got to spend the rest of your life trying to prove she was right.

Julia

When it won first prize you went bragging about it to Aunt Maggie, didn't you?

Dick

So you're a one-time winner!

Elizabeth

Oh, you forget, Dick. In college, she was a snotty newspaper reporter who got herself mixed up with that academic freedom nonsense. She couldn't be a teacher like everyone else.

Julia

Oh for God's sake, not that again!

Elizabeth

Where have you gotten with all your college degrees? Do you have a husband? No. Are you a famous writer? No. You've managed to revise a lot of other writers' editorial hack work. And that's all.

Dick

All right. All right, Elizabeth. You're working yourself up. Anthony's death has unnerved you.

Julia

Yes, Uncle Tony's death has unnerved you. Because we're all going to die someday. Very upsetting!

(Immediate blackout. Spot on David, downstage)

David

A tragedy, Tony's death...but to himself alone, perhaps. Who was Tony? Sister Maggie may enlighten us.

(Spot centers on Maggie, Artie and Pat. Artie is sitting moodily doing nothing. Pat is on the telephone. Maggie is removing tags from a new dress.)

Pat

Vince, you don't have to go to the wake...and I'd rather you didn't...well, all the relatives will gawk at you...oh, they'll make allusions to when we're getting married and all that...what do you mean how can they look forward to it if I don't? That's not fair...

(Is ready to get excited but is obviously calmed down by Vince)

All right, pick me up after school the day after tomorrow... That's right, I decided you're not coming to the wake... About 4:30. I have a PTA-type thing with some mothers. Okay, Vince, goodbye.

Maggie

Why don't you let him come?

Artie

What for? He's not a member of the family. Bet he wouldn't spend any money on flowers.

Maggie

But he's going to be...

Pat

(Looks at her dad as if to say, "Oh, Stop",
but smiles, almost in agreement)
Now, Mother, if Vince comes, I'll have to stay with him and
miss all the family dirt.

(Moves from telephone and sits playfully next
to her father)
Daddy, instead of going to the Trotter's Saturday, why
don't you take me shopping for a new Easter outfit?

Artie

You want to be on the safe side - buy all your clothes
before you get married to Vince the pennypincher, hmm?

Maggie

Artie! That's not a nice way to speak about Vince.
Every penny counts when you're studying medicine. When
he's a doctor...

Artie

In ten years, maybe.

Pat

(Musing)
We won't even be able to afford a maid on my teacher's
salary.

Maggie

What maid?

Pat

Don't get shook up, Mother. I guess we'll manage without
one...What a snazzy dress.

Maggie

You like it?

Pat

It's lovely but you have three other black dresses that you
could have worn.

Maggie

You know how it is, the whole family will be there.

Pat

I thought we leaped ahead of them when you let slip that you pay the landscaper more than anyone else in the family.

Artie

(Nervously consulting his watch)
It's getting late. Didn't you get me home early so I could drive you to the beauty parlor?

Pat

Beauty parlor--today?

Maggie

(Flutters around, accomplishing nothing)
I must go. I'm turning all different colors. Can't put it off another minute. And besides...

Pat

(Cuts in)
Everybody will be there.

Artie

Why I'm sitting home twiddling my thumbs while those nincompoops at the plant are messing up all the orders I'll never know.

Maggie

(In a hurt tone)
Artie, my brother.

Artie

I stay home for the funeral, I stay home when one of my innumerable nieces graduates from somewhere or other, I stay home when Lillian throws another fit, aah...

(Spot blacks out, then moves to a kitchen table, with sister Josephine and her daughter Lillian facing one another crosstage. Lillian is picking frequently from a box of chocolates.)

Josephine

I wish you'd go to the wake, Lily.

Lillian

(Sullen)

No.

Josephine

What will my sisters think? There they are with their perfectly normal daughters. I can't even manage to bring my own daughter to her uncle's wake.

(Watches her eating)

At the rate you're going, you'll be too bloated to go anywhere. I don't understand. I honest to God don't understand.

Lillian

Don't bother about understanding, Mother. Just excuse me with a shrug.

Josephine

If you were a teenager, sitting there and brooding all day long. Whoever heard of a grown woman--a woman who stays in bed till twelve, never goes out, almost never does any work...

Lillian

Oh leave me alone, Mother!

Josephine

Leave her alone, she says. If you were an artist or a writer...But you're not.

Lillian

I'm an exception.

Josephine

If only you're father were alive.

Lillian

My father. My father means as much to me as Uncle Anthony means to me.

Josephine

How can you be so cruel?

Lillian

That's right, Mother. I'm a selfish, rotten, despicably cruel daughter who wanted and needed a father when I was thirteen, but fate decided otherwise. Poor Josephine, your sister Elizabeth will say...

(Goes into imitation of her Aunt Elizabeth)
'Lillian is such a burden with her moods. I read an article in the Readers Digest all about her type of case.' My type of case. Why don't you bitches put me away, since I'm such a disgrace to the family.

Josephine

(Crying)
Oh Lily, Lily.

Lillian

Either I'm a fat slob or I look like a haggard witch. Forgive me for being such a nuisance.

(Stands, picking up box of candy)
I'm going to my room. Give my regards to all our sane, sober relatives.

(Lights out. Spot on David downstage)

Enter family.

David

Theresa is the oldest sister...

(While David is talking, another spot picks up Theresa kneeling far upstage. The "Our Father" is audible)
not as old as she looks, however--twenty-four hours ago, forty-eight hours ago, she was probably doing the same thing as now, kneeling, praying, for a sick brother, a dead brother...and her lost son. She is shabby in black hand-me-downs. A proud beauty at one time...so careful and so petty about frills and men and jewelry, and then something snapped and a guilt so terrible entered her soul that she has spent all of her life since on her knees. I believe she's been inside every church in this city at least once. Wouldn't be surprised if she hasn't stumbled into a synagogue every now and then. In her disturbed state of mind, any kind of ritualistic religion becomes a crutch to her uncertain sanity--if you call what she has sanity. Maggie and Lucille would gladly give her their three-year olds minks so she wouldn't shame them with her appearance. Lucille never wears hers. She's always too ill to go anywhere.

(Spot out on Theresa, shifts to Lucille, with glass of water in hand, before table littered with bottles of pills; Joe, smoking cigar, is reading the Wall St. Journal; Carole is within shadow of the circle of light, but she has no 'prop' or identifying attitude. She remains in semi-darkness until David appears on the scene.)

David

Oh, yes, I've met Lucille. Joe, her husband, is my boss. Or am I repeating myself. I just want to be sure you get everyone straight. Anyway, I was over there last night--about a new detergent account. They've got a comfy little chateau on the North Shore. Charming. Lousy with thick rugs and bad paintings. Fourth, maybe fifth time I've been there. Mostly business. Lucille rarely can muster enough strength to supervise a dinner for more than two people. I'd be three. She eats baby food so she doesn't count. Carole? Well, now.

(Wanders about a trifle aimlessly, as if he were finding it difficult to express himself)
Lovely, young Carole. A freshman in college, unformed, unformed, hemmed in an unthinking, insensitive environment. She might be compared to a wet piece of clay that could be shaped into a figure of beauty, grace and delight; a figure reflecting profundity of mind and soul and heart; a figure to love. What a work of art for the right man--what a challenge!

(Begins to withdraw into shadows)
These past few weeks have been fascinating...last night, for instance...

(Spot out on David)

Lucille

(whines)

Did you have to ask David over, even after you heard about my brother? I think that was very inconsiderate, especially since he's not familiar with Christian customs.

Joe

So he'll find out. This thing...

(Picks up letter)

just flew in from the coast and I won't be in the office tomorrow.

Lucille

(mutters)

How will they ever manage without you.

Joe

(Doesn't hear her)

They're waiting for our go-ahead and I won't get much of a chance to talk to David at the wake.

Lucille

At the wake--what for?

Joe

He's a representative of the office, and...I want him there...

Lucille

(Ignores Joe)

Carole, be a dear and get Mother the bottle of green tablets with the white stripes...and stop squinting. Must get you a pair of contact lenses.

Carole

(grinaces)

The green tablets...the ones for Little Joe?

Lucille

Little Joe?

Carole

Your ulcer--the one you named after Daddy.

Joe

You named your ulcer for me. Your ulcer instead of my son.

Lucille

Don't change the subject. I wish you wouldn't bring David into our home...he's...

Joe

He's a nice boy. And smart. I wish our Carole would marry a boy with brains like his.

(joking)

Could use a bright son-in-law in the business.

Lucille

(Puts hands to mouth in horror)
Don't even say such a thing. Carole will marry a nice Christian boy who's an open book, who'll bring his children over once a week to see their grandmother, who'll have a nice home with a finished basement in Huntington with a secure nine-to-five job in anything except advertising.

Joe

(sotto voce)
How cooperative you are.

(David enters from shadows)

David

Good evening.

Joe

(Rises, crosses to meet David, smiles.)
Glad to see you, David. Sit down.
(Indicates chair)

David

My sympathies, Joe.
(Joe remembers and wipes smile off his face)
And, of course, to you, Lucille...We'll try not to disturb you.
(Carole returns with tablets)
(David stands)

Carole

Hello, Mr. Lerner. Here are your tablets, Mother.

Lucille

Thank you, dear.

David

(to Carole)
May I offer you my chair?

Carole

(momentarily confused)

Why, no, no thank you, I'll take the hassock.

(She sinks down onto the hassock, as David shrugs, sits down and watches her)

Joe

(to David)

So their ad manager wants to shift emphasis to west coast consumer media, slicing the budget into little pieces....

(Lights fade to denote passage of time)

and that's it. Do we open another office or lose the account?

(Carole is sitting on the hassock listening. Lucille appears to be dozing)

David, let's take a break. How about some coffee?

David

Lucille's asleep. I wouldn't want to disturb her.

Joe

Asleep? Couldn't be.

(Lucille opens her eyes)

She's got an incurable insomnia.

Lucille

(Stands, smiling)

I'll make coffee. That is what you want, isn't it?

(Exits into shadows)

Joe

I'll go set the table in the dining room. My wife's not too strong.

(Exits)

(David turns to Carole)

David

How do you feel about funerals, Carole?

Carole

Why, I, ah, never really thought about it.

David

Think about it.
(dead silence)

Carole

That's a strange order...almost as strange as a wake itself... My mother and aunts are extra particular about what they wear. After all, there will be people they haven't seen since the last wake. There's gossip about who's not speaking to which relative, and cousin Lillian's weight--that is, if Aunt Josephine isn't with them. Outside the funeral parlor their handkerchiefs go into action. It's odd. I wonder what their real feelings are about Uncle Anthony's death.

David

(wryly)
Yes, I wonder.

Carole

But why am I telling you all these things? Why do you always pounce on me the minute we're alone? The way you stare at me sometimes makes me uneasy. I don't understand how a seventeen-year old could possibly interest you.

David

Don't you understand that I've wanted to know all about you, Carole? I want to know what you think, what you see with those innocent eyes. Your eyes are quite beautiful, by the way.

Carole

(surprised)
Thank you:

David

Do you read, do you ever go to the theatre, do you like music, what do you like?

Carole

Well...of course I read, although our high school library at St. Claire's was very dull...

David

Ah, a convent school. I understand. Convents, Hebrew schools, all the same jazz. But now that you're in college, now, read-everything- and know...you will throw away deeply imbedded ideas in a superb revolution... How old are you?

Carole

Seventeen. How old are you?

David

Thirty.

Carole

Oh:

David

Old?

Carole

Oh, no!

David

Age, as your mother would most undoubtedly agree, is not the only obstacle.

Carole

Obstacle to what?

David

Marriage.

Carole

(uncomprehending)

I want to get married someday soon when I'm still young, so my children and I can see something of the world together. I guess you don't agree, being thirty years old and unmarried.

David

My three previous wives and our eleven children saw a good deal of the world together from the Brooklyn Lying-In Hospital.

(Carole laughs gaily)

David

You are speaking with a man whose children have seen the Orient, Alaska and Beverly Hills, strapped to their mother's back, and they enjoyed every minute of it.

(Carole laughs harder)

Unfortunately, we had a bit of an accident near Los Angeles. My second wife tripped and fell into the Chavez Ravine but Mr. O'Malley was kind enough not to press trespassing charges.

Carole

(Gasping with laughter)

Stop it, please.

David

(half serious, half playful)

Will you be my fourth wife?

Carole

(senses changed mood)

No...I

(David approaches her carefully, then leans over and delicately kisses her on the lips. Carole responds, hesitantly, and looks up at David searchingly as he moves slowly away from her)

Carole

(bewildered, childish, but trying to act adult)

What if my mother saw us? I've never been kissed before. I mean, seriously. You are serious, aren't you, David?

David

Not only am I serious, but I shall be responsible for every idea that enters that virginal brain of yours from this moment on.

Carole

Responsible? How?

Joe p... into ...

(Lucille pops back into room)

Lucille

Where's Joe?

David

He's setting the dining room table.

Lucille

(sweetly)

Good! Carole, what's David been telling you? I heard you shrieking with laughter.

Carole

(Attempts to recapture previous mood)

David was telling me about his three wives and eleven children.

(To David)

Right?

(He nods, smiling)

And how they saw the world strapped to their mother's back.

(Carole breaks out into laughter again)

Lucille

My now, aren't we getting a silly streak on? David will think you're very childish.

David

Being a little silly occasionally helps one relieve tension, prevent ulcers and be a good-looking corpse.

Lucille

You're pretty sharp, David Lerner. Do you intend to be sharp the rest of your life or do you intend to get married? Or don't you believe in marriage, since you seem to enjoy mocking it.

David

But I do believe in marriage. I happen to be planning marriage in the very near future.

(Joe, entering, hears him)

Joe

You hadn't mentioned it to me, David. Holding out?

David

Of course not, Joe, you certainly would be the first to know.

Lucille

After the prospective bride, of course.

David

Perhaps even before.

Carole

How do you know she'll accept?

David

(Carefull circling Carole as he speaks)
I feel her acceptance. I feel the response in her to me.
I feel the blindness within her groping for the vision
I can give her.

Lucille

That was much too personal a question for you to ask, Carole.

David

On the contrary, Lucille, as it is she who must answer. For I intend to make Carole Mrs. David Lerner. I hope you have no objection.

(Lucille looks to Joe, absolutely shocked, then fast blackout)
(End of flashback. back to where David has first entered upon the scene at the funeral parlor. Frieze of all the relatives, except Carole, who shyly goes to meet David. Each of the sisters slowly becomes 'live', and as they do, turn toward the couple, registering various degrees of surprise, shock and even fear. The husbands duplicate their wives' reactions. Cousin Julia looks interested and faintly amused. Pat is wide-eyed.)

Carole

What am I to do? Mother has told everyone and they object so fiercely.

David

Roll with the punch, Spapsie, this is only round one.

Carole

What?

David

You are going to marry me, aren't you?
(no visible answer)

All right--don't worry yet--the decision is many rounds away.

Carole

(looking toward bier)
My uncle is a kind-looking man.

David

One of those lost people of the earth who live and die and are forgotten.

Carole

But David, his sisters will remember him.

David

Will they? They only needed him to fetch and carry until they married. Now they've got husbands to do it. Uncle Tony has accomplished his mission on earth.

Carole

I don't want to believe that one can mean so little to people--people who are so close as sisters...

David

(Grabs her by the shoulders)
Don't ever change. Stay naive and fresh and beautiful.
Don't become a cynic--believe in the future, believe in yourself, believe in me.

Carole

(a little frightened)
I will try to be what you want, David, But...

David

But?

Carole

(The sisters and their respective 'circles' are now quite 'live' and begin to advance on the couple)
But I may not be given the chance.

David

What does it matter what they say. I'll save you from being like the others--the Julias, Pats and Lillians--and their stagnating mothers. You've got to say to hell with all that--and leave, with me. And never look back. Never.

Carole

(Looks about, confused by the relatives converging upon her)
I don't know what you all expect of me. A man has asked me to marry him and you stand there and accuse me with your eyes. What are you accusing me of? And who are you to accuse me?

(Turns to David)
I'm so confused, David, please help me.

(He just stares at her, as Julia unobtrusively works her way up to where David and Carole are standing. She turns toward audience.)

Julia

Gods, anyone?

(FAST CURTAIN ON ACT ONE)

ACT TWO

(Two spots slowly reveal Julia downstage right with her chin resting on a fist as she sits on a chair pushed up against a wall. Carole stands and moves about restlessly centerstage.)

Julia

(speaking to audience)

I would say Carole is luckier than most, wouldn't you? No? Don't you wish you had been given a choice like hers sometime in there amid the teens. I know I wish I had. Believe it or not, most of us were rather innocent at seventeen. We were yet to discover we had the ways and the means to snag someone of the opposite sex. After plenty of subliminal practice on our own sex. Then our modern Mother steps from the sidelines and starts coaching for real. Such things as contact lenses,

(Carole grimaces)

eyebrow pencil, foundation makeup, brushing after every meal and long nails assume a vast importance, under her direction. Punch ball is now passe. The beauty parlor replaces the Saturday afternoon movie. If there's a high school dance on Friday night, you go to the high school dance but you stay as far away from your five girl friends as possible, so that someone will ask you to dance The Fish. If you're not going steady you sit home Saturday night and watch "Talanin" but never admit seeing it. And if there is a church dance on Sunday night, you go to the church dance and stay as far away from your five girl friends as possible so that someone will ask you to dance the Cha-Cha. Museums? Who do you meet in museums? asks Mother. Theatre? Who do you meet in the theatre except nasty, lecherous old men who thrive in the fleshpots of New York. The opera? The Philharmonic? Dirty, nasty, lecherous old men, but with longer hair. You should dance and "mingle." And don't talk too much...ad nauseum. So at eighteen you aren't so innocent. And at nineteen you're practically a snob about it, or already married. Or maybe when you're near thirty, like me, you ask yourself again and again, Do I want a husband? Why does a woman marry? Do I really want a husband? To cook for, clean for, shop for, disfigure myself for? And you answer yourself, for heaven's sake, what kind of question is that? So you marry the next poor slob who comes along because it's the thing to do. And when you're forty, and you've had him and you've turned him into a vegetable, you ask yourself again. Is this a companion--this bore, this stranger?... Why if I ever had the opportunity to escape...

(Looks at audience with the trace of a grin)

Yes?

Carole

Why are you so bitter, Julia? And why involve me?

Julia

Carole, you are the only one of us that is yet untouched. Pat, Lillian, me --we've passed the point of no return. We've committed ourselves to our own private hells. But you? You still have a choice--more than one.
(Carole looks surprised)

You can retreat into the claws of a loving but prosaic family. Or you can follow David on his poetic path--two against a world. Bravo! Encore! But then erosion will creep in...just as surely as it creeps into any other union. An inflection in your voice will sound commonplace; an opinion, shallow, and he will despise you because you are no longer a fragile, unique object of adoration. You squirm. Had that thought possibly occurred to you?

Carole

(partially to audience)

That is what I fear more than anything else. I'm not perfect. I'm not even close to perfect. How do I tell him? How do I open his eyes? Tomorrow or the next day may be too late.

(to Julia)

Is there another alternative?

Julia

Leave. Put on a pair of comfortable flats, grab a trenchcoat and hop the first steamer to South America. Or Africa. Or Europe if you're bourgeois. Say hello to Mr. Wang and Mrs. Garibaldi and Princess Grace if you can get an audience.

Carole

You mean escape, run off, flee--is it freedom? Why don't you?

Julia

Why don't I? The proper moment has passed me by. I haven't got what it takes--sufficient talent in the field I chose. I found out too late, and kept at it too long. The flesh is willing but the spirit is weak. So, since I couldn't place, or even show, I'm doomed to be shoved at all manner of men till I'm forty, or more, because what else is there for me to do but marry--so they think.

Carole

(puzzled)
But, you're beautiful!

Julia

Yes, look at me. I have a beautiful body. It's full and sensuous and lithe. A body men want to possess.

(sotto voce)
A body that writhes with wanting to be possessed.

Carole

Julia, I don't understand.

Julia

I can't use my body as merchandise to barter for a superior male. I just can't divorce my mind from my body. It's there, it functions, it should be cultivated, not stunted. But sometimes the mind and the body refuse to cooperate with one another. Riddles, Carole, the world is a riddle...

(Julia stands abruptly as background brightens slowly. Josephine is trying to comfort Theresa near the bier as the other three sisters converge on the small anteroom. Carole and Julia slip into shadows where they are able to converse and still remain part of the next scene.)

Josephine

Come on now, Theresa, sit outside and have some coffee. You'll make yourself sick, crying and carrying on without let-up.

Theresa

No, no, no. My place...it is here. I must pray to God for Anthony's soul.

(chants)

Oh my God, have mercy on his soul. Have mercy on his good soul. Oh my God, let him rest. Let him sleep in peace...

Maggie

(sardonically)

Oh my God!

Lucille

(to Elizabeth)

Well, what am I to do? She certainly can't marry him... I've never liked him. He's so smug, so sure of himself just like all of them. Even Joe sounds like him sometimes. I'll never give my permission. Never. I'll lock her in her room until he goes away. She's such a child--she doesn't know what's expected of her. It is hateful, hateful.

(to forestage)

Julia

Do you know what's expected of you?

Carole

I should hope so.

Julia

Hm. Well, you needn't trouble yourself about it yet-- I remember him saying he was only interested in sowing seeds in your mind and letting the body lie fallow.

(upstage)

Elizabeth

(Attempts to comfort Lucille)

Don't be so desperate, Lucille. Now there was an article in the Readers Digest

(capt attention)

where they wrote about a situation exactly like this. The thing to do is let them see each other once a week. Eventually they will tire of each other because you know they have nothing in common. But if you fight it, they'll only strain toward each other and against you.

(forestage)

Julia

Somehow David doesn't strike me as the Saturday night-only, crew cut boy-next-door.

Carole

Even without the crew.

(upstage)

Lucille

Elizabeth, how can I possibly let them see each other. Carole is so impressionable. What does she understand. How could she possibly...control him?...Josephine, what do you think is best?

Josephine

You ask my opinion? I haven't even been able to help my own daughter. I don't know this man. No doubt you'll do what you like without our help. If you make the wrong decision, then you'll have to live with it.

Maggie

I have an idea!

Elizabeth

So?

Maggie

I'll have Vince over to dinner and invite David. We can be very subtle.

Carole

(forestage)
Aunt Maggie, subtle?

Josephine

(upstage)
Do you really think you'll be able to accomplish anything?

Maggie

Listen!

(Turns to Theresa who is chanting a little too loud)
Quiet, Theresa...Now, let me set the scene...

Julia

(forestage)
This should be unusually enlightening.

(End of scene. Lower curtain. When curtain is raised, a backstage spot picks up Pat, Vince and David, who are standing about, waiting to sit down to dinner. Julia and Carole are barely visible still in forestage positions.)

David

I understand, Vince, that you and Pat are getting married.

Vince

That's right. We've set the date.

Julia

(forestage)
For the fourth time.

Pat

We're having a large church wedding.

Julia

(forestage)
She would like to lose the invitations.

David

Very nice.

Vince

(After prodding by Pat)
Don't you think, David, that it's wise to start a marriage off right, with the man and woman kneeling at an altar or standing together in temple?

Pat:

When people are both of the same religion, their children have strong guidance while they are growing up.

David

You've made a very good point, there.

Carole

(forestage)
Is that supposed to be David?

Julia

Hardly. That's Aunt Maggie--subtlety, politeness and tact--her picture of David Lerner.

Maggie

(from shadows)

Dinner is served.

(Spot moves to a dinner table. Artie is already seated.)

David, I hope you enjoy pork tenderloin. Our whole family are great pork eaters.

David

(coughs)

Well, I, ah, have never really enjoyed pork the few times I've tried it.

Maggie

What a shame! I'll make you a ham sandwich so you won't go hungry.

Julia

(forestage)

Is David orthodox?

Carole

Orthodox? He puts butter on his roast beef sandwiches!

Artie

How long have you been in advertising, David?

David

Five years. I had four in the Air Force after college and then Joe took me into his firm.

Artie

Made many contacts?

David

Joe does the contact work. I'm the inside media man.

Artie

So you don't know too many advertising people. I mean, if you ever decided to go out on your own?

David

(supposedly cowed)

No.

Julia

(forestage)

I rather think they underestimate David, don't you?

Carole

I think it's funny.

Julia

Yes...it is sort of funny.

Pat

My cousin Carole is such a shy kid. She hasn't even begun to date seriously yet and she's seventeen. Why, she hasn't had the opportunity of getting to know different types of men. How can she know her own mind yet.

Julia

(forestage)

Pat has been going with Vince for six years.

Vince

Look at me. I'm not finished interning, so Pat and I will have to struggle together for awhile. We'll be ballast against one another until I've made the grade...

Julia

(forestage)

Ship ahoy!

Vince

But you, David, you're pretty set in your ways.

Artie

Carole would have to do all the adjusting--it wouldn't be a two-way deal.

Maggie

And she knows nothing about the important things. How to make a good martini or plan a dinner for eight

Carole

Are those the important things?
(forestage)

Julia

Ssh. Our hero speaks.

David

I have been selfish. I wanted something and I had nothing in return to give. You are right.
(he stands)

Say goodbye to Carole for me--and thank you for a lovely dinner.

(Lights out. Spot back on group of sisters)

Maggie

...so all I have to do is have David over and he'll see that he is wrong for Carole.

Julia

(forestage)

What could I possibly say wittily that hasn't already been vulgarly whispered under everyone's breath.

Joe

(Butts in on group from shadows)

Here you are. I thought you were having a prayer meeting. Everyone's wondering what happened to you all.

Lucille

(accusingly)

We were discussing your daughter.

Joe

Our daughter.

Lucille

You don't appear grieved.

Joe

About old Tony?

Lucille

About your daughter.

Joe

Our daughter. From the day she was born, you've taught her every variation of what she's expected to think and now that she has ideas you didn't plant, she's my daughter.

Elizabeth

Joe, you're out of your mind.

Joe

Yes. Look--I like David and I love my daughter and I don't think it's so terrible they want to get married.

Lucille

(close to hysteria)
I can't stand it. My poor baby. If anything happens I'll die.

Julia

(forestage)
Is that a promise or a threat?

Carole

Julia:

Theresa

(screams)
Save his soul. Save all our souls.

Julia

Amen.

(Dim on bier scene)

Carole

I don't know how to cook.

Julia

What does it matter if you gain the whole kitchen and suffer the loss of the bedroom.

Carole

Excuse me?

Julia

You're a very mixed-up gal right now. You don't know where to turn, do you?

(David walks out of the shadows over to Carole)

David

She knows she can turn to me.

Julia

(Takes several steps toward them)

And you will bring her pain. You're not being realistic. Carole is not in a glass-encased vacuum sitting in the museum for inspection... Besides, she'll disappoint you.

David

She will not.

Julia

No? Are you so sure? Is she enough woman for you, David?

(Moves between David and Carole)

Is any woman enough woman for you?

Carole

(a trifle sarcastic)

I hate to interrupt...

David

(brushes past Julia to go to Carole)
My sweet Carole, I have neglected you to spar with a
two-faced ally.

Carole

Listen to her, David.

Julia

(Walks toward audience)

If you remember, at the beginning of this act, I posed the question as to why a woman marries. Let's flip the coin over. Why does a man marry? A man is self-sufficient, powerful, virile and because he is forced to be monogamous, he has to support the woman he sleeps with. His strength is thus sapped by his woman, who is conditioned by the same society to make demands which rob him of individuality. He must be successful, within the narrow confines of what is termed success. Eventually he loses his virility, his ideas, his power and turns into that boring stranger that the woman despises at forty. The eternal battle of the sexes in our way of life. To what end? Propagation? To make a prophet out of Adam Smith and his theories of overpopulation? It's a vicious cycle that leads to further vicious cycles who have grandchildren...

David

(wheels Julia around to face him)

What's your special gripe?

Julia

(shouts)

Where is my father in this play?

Carole

Does love mean nothing at all?

Julia

Love? You really believe that you're in love? What do you mean by love?

Carole

(hesitant)

Well...you can't conjugate the word, love...it's a simple noun...unprejudiced...who's to define it?

Julia

Obviously, you can't.

David

And you?

Julia

Yes...but love isn't within my grasp, not close-up, only at a distance.

(stares at David)

Admire from afar, but don't get too close or you'll see the ugliness.

David

She means sex.

Julia

Partly. My id and my ego are all screwed up.

David

Lack of cooperation between mind and body?

Julia

You've been eavesdropping. Yes, David, queer mysteries lurk in the mind. They refuse to conform to the body. Each month, the pattern repeats...the desire, then the barrenness continuously in-fighting for the advantage. Loathing oneself for the indecision. Feeding on self analysis and logic and rotting inside. Trying to patch the split psyche. Fearing a marriage that would make some poor slob unhappy...

Carole

I wonder why you think you should deliver me from David.

Julia

I don't want you to fall into error with him. I don't want you to be hurt. It will be hell for you to live the conventional life after his visions of nirvana.

David

With me she will not live the conventional life.
(mocks Julia)
Have you no faith, Julia?

Julia

In you, David? Or in love? Or in nirvana, perhaps?

(Mass bells ring in B.G. Julia smiles
at David and walks into shadows)

Carole

The funeral Mass, David. I must go in.

David

(As he pulls Carole to him and kisses her)
I will never let them destroy you.

Carole

I'll be back, David.
(She disappears into shadows)

David

Will you?
(Lights a cigarette and puffs thoughtfully
as he listens to the funeral mass choir.
Lillian enters.)
The Mass has begun.

Lillian

I know. I didn't intend to go in, just to listen. I was very fond of Uncle Anthony.

David

Pardon me, but aren't you Lillian? I'm David Lerner.

Lillian

(warily)
Hello David. You've been stealing scenes from me lately. They have a juicier topic of conversation these days.

David

They?

Lillian

The matriarchs. You're fighting a losing battle. They're quite formidable.

David

The decision is Carole's, not theirs. I don't understand all this fuss. The damndest people mate every day.

Lillian

And have the damndest trouble. Does she half comprehend what her life will be like. What she's going into?

David

I don't know.

Lillian

Then do you have the right to snatch her up like this and possibly ruin her life. It is easy to let someone or something ruin your life. You are a happy, carefree child and death cuts into the sunshine, leaving a hideous scar that is never healed. Childhood must be allowed to last as long as possible. Why should mature people like you hurry a child's maturity and the agony that goes with it. Today you see prim old ladies of eleven and battle scarred men of thirteen...

David

Then ignorance is bliss?

Lillian

Oh yes, there can be no question.

David

So, okay. You go blissfully through your teens completely oblivious to the opposite sex. Some squirmy little clerk proposes to you when you're past twenty. You say yes. You get married. Our squirmy clerk has been repressed all his life. He's an ugly terror in bed. You don't know what the hell he's doing. You're frightened, disgusted. This ignorance is bliss?

Lillian

You're twisting my meaning. Do you have any idea what you'll look like before this child.

David

(losing his temper)
Don't keep calling her a child. She's seventeen years old.

Lillian

Carole is a child. Her mother...

David

...influences her to behave exactly as Mama wants.

Lillian

Her mother has an iron hand even if she's got a weak stomach. You'll never beat Aunt Lucille. And Aunt Lucille is so much stronger with Aunt Elizabeth and Aunt Maggie firmly banded together, behind her.

David

And your mother?

Lillian

(sighs)
Mother is too tired to continue holding up her end of our world.
(Movements upstage indicate the service is over)

David

If Carole is firm, we can beat the world.

Lillian

If...

(Pallbearers--Artie, Joe, Dick and Ralph carry coffin downstage near where David and Lillian are standing. The sisters follow, with their families in back of them, closely trailed by the remaining relatives. The men stare at David and set the coffin down in front of him. Lillian backs off into the crowd, drawing a few stares, and David is left standing alone.)

Joe

Oh David, David, why are you here, now?

Artie

You're purposely aggravating the situation.

Dick

I can't stomach kikes who try to be smart.

David

(Ignores the comments, looks around,
calls aloud--)

Carole?

Maggie

David, you'll never get permission to marry her. You're a nice boy. There are so many girls who would be good for you.

David

There is only one who is good enough.

Julia

For you or for her?

Elizabeth

(to Julia)

This is not your business.

(to David)

Our brother is not yet buried and there you stand smug and superior, taking advantage of our mourning to seduce this child into marrying you. Are you willing to be so irreverent, so unfair?

David

I see that you are willing to smother another life the way you smothered your brother's.

Lucille

How dare you speak to us like that!

Joe

(quietly)

He only speaks the truth.

Lucille

(Shuts up momentarily to stare at her husband)

He shall not have Carole.

(enunciates each word very carefully)

He would have to kill me first!

David

(contemptuously)

Killing is your way, not mine.

Carole

(Slowly parts crowd and goes toward David)

David, have you no compassion for your parents?

David

(taken aback)

Of course, but...Carole, how can I have any feeling for their stupidity, for their heartlessness...

Carole

Sometimes you must have compassion. You strip yourself bare when you scorn those who are less than you. Don't forget, I am part of them and they are part of me.

David

How is it that such diseased loins can produce...

Carole

(cuts him off)

I'm not this rare jewel that you're making me out to be. I'm just me. I don't belong on a pedestal. If we marry, I will be a disappointment to you. And I ...how would I please you?

David

(pleading)

Just by being what you are.

Carole

What I am now, what I was yesterday, what I will be tomorrow or at three o'clock today?

David

Oh my God. I'm losing you to this pack of vultures who can't wait to devour you and set you firmly on the paths of pseudo-righteousness and accursed conformity to all the hypocrisies.

(The procession of relatives begins to move offstage, leaving David and Carole alone.)

You will not come with me. You listen to your cousin Julia, who tears down 'love and marriage.' You listen to a hive of queen bees and their drones who cloud the atmosphere with attar of putrescence, honeyed with veiled threats and promises of brown sugar...

Carole

No, David. I am not listening to Julia with her sadness spilling into her logic. I am not listening to the queen bees. I am not even listening to myself at the moment. My senses are deaf.

(She begins to move toward direction previous relatives had moved)

I cannot go with you.

(She walks a few more steps)

Not yet.

CURTAIN DESCENDS ON SECOND ACT

ACT III

(One week later. Stage is dark, except for two opposing spots upstage, showing both David and Carole undressed for bed in their respective homes. Gershwin's "Concerto in F" underlies background. During the scene we see them move around restlessly, under the influence of love or sex or suppression, thinking aloud.)

Carole

Oh, God, I wish I could understand this love business.

David

Why is she there and I here when we could be together?

Carole

Love is supposed to make the world go round. A merry-go-round. You want to stay on and on, hoping the motion will spiral you to the top. The pinnacle of happiness. But you only get dizzy. And how long can you stay atop the pinnacle if you do reach it?

David

This world is too much with us--like dense fog it creeps into private, sacred places, pressing us into suffocating crevices...

Carole

What is the answer? Any reasonable answer.

David

Escape from the fog. Love, be loved...

Carole

Fallout...mass hysteria...tomorrow there may be war...death..

David

(As dawn comes up)

Ah, another tomorrow. And another day, week, month, year, eternity.

Carole

(stretching out her hands)

Awake the dawn that sleeps in heaven. Bring me a day of peace, of strength to think clearly, and do the positive thing.

Will I ever be strong enough?

(Later in the same morning. Lucille and Joe are having breakfast. At least Joe is. Lucille is sampling various health juices. Carole, awakening from a troubled sleep, is seen listening to their conversation as she brushes sleep from her hair.)

Joe

Is she still sleeping?

Lucille

I imagine so. All the strain she's been exposed to in the last few weeks...No wonder she had such a restless night.

Joe

David gave me his resignation yesterday.

Lucille

It's about time! What is he going to do? And in what country?

Joe

(Carole is coming into the kitchen)
I don't know. He...
(Stops when he sees Carole)

Carole

I've been up. David is resigning? As of when?

Joe

Friday. Now, honey...

Lucille

Don't you want some prune juice, dear?

Carole

No. Thank you.

Joe

I'm leaving for the office.

(no response)

Bye Carole honey.

(kisses her forehead--no response)

Be home sevenish, Lucille.

(Waves his hand ineffectually, exits)

Carole

(Watches her father as he leaves)

Mother, what is an ideal marriage?

Lucille

So early in the morning?

Carole

Yes.

Lucille

Oh.

(pauses)

An ideal marriage?...One that...one where both...
participants are equally suited to one another.

Carole

Meaning?

Lucille

You know what I mean, the same background, the same kind
of friends and education and church--that sort of thing.

Carole

Very dull.

Lucille

Why, whatever do you mean? I married your father. Each
of my sisters married men within the proper circles.
Would you say our marriages were dull?

Carole

Have I ever been disrespectful?

Lucille

No, dear, but?..

Carole

Then I won't begin now. Tell me one more thing. How did you all manage to keep your husbands?

(Lucille is unpleasantly startled)

Please don't take this too personally, Mother. I want to know. How does a woman hold onto her husband after the thing, whatever it is that attracted him, fades. Do you keep yourself young-looking, do you diet during Lent and read half-psychiatric, helpful hints on holding on to 'arry...

Lucille

I don't...

Carole

Aunt Elizabeth does. Do you flatter your husband, lead him to believe he's still the young handsome lady-killer he once was, at the same time he's watching his old movie sweetheart, Laura La Plant, on the Late Show...

Lucille

And which one of us does that?

Carole

Aunt Maggie. And you, Mother, your illness. It's a vise, a clamp and Daddy doesn't even realize it. And Aunt Josephine...

Lucille

Now you wait. Just you hold on one minute. Do you understand that the only reason you're on this earth is to be a wife to your husband, whether he's picked for you or by you? What would a career woman do with herself if it were a woman's world? She would have no one to prove herself to, so back she would go to the kitchen. From the time that a girl baby can be distinguished from a boy baby, she's on her way. She watches her mama very carefully so that by the time she's six she has begun to weave her scarcely understood charms into a web of ensnarement. She practices. She experiments. At thirteen, she wears the newest lipstick and the newest stocking shade. She's in the thick of the race and she will be right up front if she has what is vulgarly known as

guts--not a pretty face, but guts. Those in the crowd who show unconcern with it all are either lazy or lack confidence. They want to be up front but they won't assemble their weapons. As far as confidence is concerned, never fear that I can't wheedle a new dress out of your father. Or a new hat.

Carole

Or a new soul, Mother?

Lucille

What are you saying? I don't understand you. You must realize that the women in our family are women, real women.

Carole

And each of these real women have produced one child apiece. How did you all get away with it?

Lucille

(Dismisses question by pretending not to hear)

You will learn to accept the fact that even the strongest of men is putty in the hands of a knowing woman. The woman despises her role of chicanery, but she lives her lie to the end. If she's smart.

Carole

Why are you so opposed to my marriage?

Lucille

Because for sixteen and a half years you've not opened your eyes or ears to our world. I don't mean the outside world, which David thinks is so important. I mean our world right here. The other world is just a reflection. How can you expect to cope with a husband when you have never made the slightest effort to twist your father around your little finger? You've had no practice. And a David Lerner would be so much harder to twist. You were wise in refusing him.

Carole

A temporary arrangement.

Lucille

(with some alarm)
I'm positive he will leave on Friday for parts unknown
and we shall never hear from him again, thank God!

Carole

(Pulls out folded piece of paper from her
robe pocket)

Speak for yourself, Mother.
(Lucille stares at the note as Carole smooths
it out on the table)

This. This note.

(reads)

"Meet me at 10 a.m. Saturday morning if you are coming
with me."

(Hands it to her mother)

With explicit directions where we are to meet.

Lucille

You'll not go?

Carole

I haven't made my decision. There is so much I must
think about.

(She walks off slowly, thoughtfully as lights
dim. Two hours later, a phone rings once,
twice. Spots come up in 'homes' of Elizabeth
and Maggie and Lucille. A telephone wire
connecting the matriarchs is strung horizontally
across the stage. Lucille, Elizabeth and
Maggie are all on their phones with their
families hovering near them, able to
participate in the ensuing conversation.
For the first few seconds their conversation
is inaudible. Then Lucille breaks the
sound barrier.)

Lucille

I don't know how she got the note, but they are meeting
on Saturday. Ten in the morning. She hasn't seen him
since the funeral.

Elizabeth

Are you sure?

Julia

(aside)
Trusting, isn't she?

Maggie

(Pat is at her elbow)
And I thought we had such convincing arguments. Shouldn't you be sending her to Europe now?

Pat

I'll chaperone.

Julia

(Loudly, into the phone)
Pat, dear, you're getting married, remember?

Pat

Was that you Aunt Elizabeth?

Elizabeth

That was your cousin Julia. She's being very flippant about this whole thing.

Lucille

Is she for or against?

Joe

Now that's a hell of a question to ask.

Lucille

(Turns half away from phone, to Joe)
Don't be vulgar...Carole's here!

Julia

That's pretty funny. Don't use 'hell' in front of a virgin who's cramming for her finals...Theme? Turn of the Screw.

Dick

(nastily)
A nice mouth you have!

Julia

It's inherited.

Maggie

It seems to me that we certainly are getting excited.

Artie

Yeah, God damn it! Why don't you women straighten this mess out. Waylay him on Saturday--anything--so I can get back to work.

(Another spot reveals Josephine has come in and this 'party line'.)

Josephine

Are you all so violently opposed to David?

Elizabeth

He's brazen

Maggie

and a snob

Dick

Who wants a Jew in the family?

Josephine

Lucille?

Lucille

He is not right for my daughter.

Joe

Now she's her daughter.

Carole

Who is to say what kind of man is right for me, Mother, or --wrong for me?

Josephine

You know Carole, twenty years ago the parents made the arrangement.

Carole

Yes. I know. And they still do in many parts of Europe. That's why having a mistress or lover there is so easily accepted, I'm told.

Joe

Baby:

Lillian

You've grown up pretty fast, haven't you? Are you quite sure you're so innocent?

Julia

Let's avoid the kidney punches.

(Julia and Carole step away from their phones and walk toward apron of stage. The conversation continues inaudibly as they pantomime the words)

Carole

(to Julia)

You're very amused at the sight of their heels crushing me as you predicted. I think you hope they win.

Julia

That's ridiculous--don't try to blame me for your weakness. My God, Lillian was right. For nearly seventeen years you've been a question mark. Will you be any different? You were to be my last hope in this family, the only one left who could sever the umbilical cord. We were all busts, but you were going to make it--I certainly am not hoping they win, as you put it. I only would like to see you make the decision that is right for you.

Carole

Which is your favorite decision, Julia?..Don't tell me--I'll tell you. The decision that will take me to faraway places and leave David for you. And don't think I'm not sympathetic. David is very attractive,

Julia

Are you serious?

Carole

You have one spark left and you think David can fan it.
You know you can't have him completely, but you must
grasp at straws.

Julia

I wish I could fathom just what your feeling is for David.
Do you love him, do you want him with the same intensity
he wants you...? Yes, I see David's loins. And yes,
I might want to know him. But he is unattainable--
at least--as things are now--

(Carole stares at Julia as spot picks up
Theresa on telephone extension and
conversation is again audible)

Theresa

Does he eat meat on Friday? Does he go to church on
Sunday? How often does he say the Rosary? Who is his
favorite saint?

Josephine

Theresa, he's not a Catholic.

Theresa

(Makes sign of the cross)
Not Catholic. She would be living in sin!

Lucille

(getting hysterical)
Oh, my!

Joe

I don't know. This whole thing doesn't look so earthshaking,
but here we are aiming for nervous breakdowns.

Carole

(Both Carole and Julia have returned unobtru-
sively to their family group.)
Dad. Hang up. They won't solve anyone's problems.
(Lucille hangs on with a vengeance)

Carole

Don't you want to discuss things with me and with David? You act as though I were a problem child--I am neither a problem or a child-anymore. I've turned David down once. I don't know what my decision will be on Saturday. Only why does the whole family have to get several thousand words in edgewise!

Joe

(helpless)
Honey... (Carole slams phone down on hook. Spot on this family dims)

Elizabeth

Hello? Hello?

Dick

These modern kids. They should all be horsewhipped.
(Spot dims)

Pat

(disappointed)
No more? (Maggie reluctantly places phone on hook. Spot dims.)

Theresa

A terrible, terrible thing, living in sin...

Lillian

Hang up, Aunt Theresa.

(Curtain. End of scene.)

(Curtain rises on altar, half in Catholic tradition, half in Jewish tradition, atop a small flight of steps. Stage is empty except for David, who strides back and forth in front of the altar, his steps resounding hollowly.)

David

I ask you, God of the Jews,

(points)

God of the Christians,

(points)

why is there no understanding in this world? Why?
Not even between people of one family. Will we
never undo the curse of the tower of Babel? Will
there ever be a universal language that can be
understood by all human beings? Because all of them
have the same needss--the same hunger for love.
I want Carole to be my wife. I want to share the
beauty of the world, even if we have to spend our
lives searching for it. I want her in my image--
two who are as one.

Julia

(Steps from shadows, laughs.)

That's a new way of saying it. You want to inhale
her, swallow her up. But you'll vomit up something
completely different than you expect.

(accusingly)

You're forcing her to make a premature decision.

(Walks toward him, then away from him)

You're egotistic, arrogant, so,so superior, so sure
of yourself, so unafraid before oncoming disaster.
You see nothing amiss. You really believe you're
leading Carole into a never-never land.

David

I am sure of myself. And I will take Carole into
a real world away from the land of Santa Claus
and cotton candy.

Julia

I know something, David. I know that the chemistry
is all mixed up somewhere. There are elements in
both of you that don't jell. I can't explain it,
I have some sixth sense of foreboding.

David

(Walks closer to Julia as she backs away)

Do you? What element are you in the solution?
Where do you fit?

Julia

Me David? I'm in another test tube altogether.
I shall be notorious. Not famous. Notorious.

(extremely mocking)

I will throw wild hashish parties in my parents' living room and Mother will continually refill my brandy snifter and Daddy will turn on the TV so we all can watch the Late, Late Show starring Mae West and Frank Sinatra in "The Private Lives of Ma & Pa Kinsey."

David

How tragic! Lost--lost--

Julia

(The tone changes)

Or I will sit at the typewriter and make meaningless sentences while Mother drowns me out with the Arthur Murray dance party; and I'll go faithfully to the theatre once a month and properly discuss it after a profound study of Taubman and Kerr reviews, and...I'll probably have a miserable affair with a man like you David...

David

And?

Julia

And?

(A long stare. Sound of voices approaching. Lights up as the whole family descends on the altar. David turns from Julia to face them)

Vox populi!

(She turns from David and descends the steps, walking through the oncoming relatives, disappearing in the crowd. The husbands begin to assail David, goaded by their wives.)

Dick

We work hard and long to get what we want. You come, you see, you take--without regard for anyone's feelings--with no thought for anyone except yourself. You're just a shyster, trying to steal what doesn't belong to you.

David

(musing)
One pound of flesh...
(harshly)
Are you afraid she will change her mind and come with me? Is that why you wish to crucify me?

Artie

He sounds exactly like that snotty union organizer who's giving me so much trouble with his crucifixion scenes.

Joe

(Climbs several steps toward David)
Carole is my only daughter.
(Everyone is suddenly quiet, the better to hear what Joe is to say)
A father wants the world for his daughter, the best possible world; something special, because his daughter is special. I have discovered that the world I live in is not the best possible world--not even second best. So I will not confine Carole within its lost boundaries. I want her to live,
(He turns from David to Lucille)
and if she chooses to live with David, then I too choose David.
(He shifts his gaze to Artie and Dick)
Because he is a man.
(The group begins to mutter confusedly)

David

(Smiles warmly at Joe, then frowns as he looks at his wristwatch.)
It's past 10 o'clock.
(Strains eyes toward audience)
Carole?

Lucille

Joe, you're such a bad loser, even when you're playing the hero.

David

Carole?
(to audience)

I can't believe you've won. I won't believe it. It would be right and proper, wouldn't it, for each of us to turn our backs on the other. Nice little tragedy. You can dab your eyes with that up-to-now dry handkerchief. After all, we wouldn't want you to have a wasted evening. Or would we?

(David paces restlessly back and forth, as spot shifts to another part of the stage, showing Carole talking to Aunt Josephine, who is not part of the group at the altar.)

Carole

Aunt Josie, he's waiting for me. You've always been so much more understanding than my Mother or the others. I really am confused. I...

Josephine

(troubled)

Well, Carole, I don't know. You're very young.

Carole

That's not a reason.

Josephine

Carole, let me explain something to you. Our parents were not born in America. We had to teach ourselves how to live; we didn't have a mother who knew about boys or dating or the right thing to wear. It was very painful sometimes to make mistakes while we were learning, but we were determined to be as American as any other woman, with no trace of an accent or old-fashioned ideas. So naturally we attracted old-fashioned men who hadn't lost their foreign mannerisms and prejudices. They worshipped us because we were sharper than they were. We're more American. We fit. Do you belong with us? I hope so, because when you marry--in a few years--you'll have pretty children and a guy who'll buy you shrubbery for the front of the house.

Carole

(ponders a moment)

Is there any reason why David shouldn't buy me shrubbery?

(Light dims on Carole and Josephine and comes up on David striding back and forth, peering at his watch. He stops suddenly and smiles as Carole parts the group of relatives, stops at the foot of the steps, then slowly ascends to embrace David. They link arms and turn to face the crowd.)

Lucille

Oh God!

Elizabeth

(to Carole)
You've made your bed...

David

(grins)
She'll lie in it.

Pat

Do you really want this marriage? You're quite happy to plunge into the sewing and the dishwashing and the scrubbing and the...

Vinco

Is that your problem? You've never been housebroken?

Carole

(cooly)
Of course I've always hated housework, except that now there is someone who will appreciate that I'm doing it just for him.

Pat

And ten, twenty years from now? He'll still compliment you on your clean kitchen floor, your shiny toilet seat?

David

Take that damn silver spoon out of your mouth and stick it...

Carole

(laying a restraining hand on his arm)
David, you are being narrow also. Don't condemn them because of their prejudices and faults and pettiness. They're my family, an average American family.

David

Yeh. The average American matriarchy. And there they stand. Indivisible with liberty and justice for all. Thank God I can take you away with me, away from their damned influence.

Carole

(too sweetly)
Of course, David.

David

(to relatives)

I will take her away from you before she changes from one of we to one of you. It's a race against time and any sweat needed is worth it.

Lucille

Wait!

Carole

Now Mother. David will be very good to me. There's no need to worry. We really didn't mean we would escape you completely. Of course we'll visit. Naturally, that's up to David.

David

I...

Carole

I can see into the future and know that all your wishes for my happiness will be fulfilled. And they will be fulfilled with David. Despite your warning and because of your warning. Thank you for your blessings.

(turns to David to face the altar)

David?

(David begins to recite the marriage vows with both Carole and himself bathed in a white spotlight. Scrim descends to partially screen the ceremony, but couple is still visible in spotlight.)

David

I take thee, Carole, for my lawful wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part.

(Lights begin to dim as the voice of an unseen priest bridges a year's time)

Voice

Your children are not your children
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself
They come through you but not from you
And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.

(As lights come up, all the relatives, with the exception of the cousins and David, are still at the foot of the altar. They remain frozen throughout the scene. Another spot downstage left shows a new 'home'--Carole's. Carole is now surrounded with 'props'--frilly curtains on a window, several telephones, hair curlers, a coffeepot. Carole and Pat, both dressed in house dresses and floppy slippers, are drinking coffee. Both are pregnant.)

Carole

Were you sick this morning?

Pat

Naturally. Vince was late to class for the second time this week.

Carole

Why did I have to get pregnant?

Pat

You wouldn't let David use a...

Carole

Never mind. Can I help it if he's a...

Pat

Where is David?

Carole

Business trip.

Pat

Again?

Carole

He's very devoted.
(sarcastic)

(Phone rings. Carole picks up the green one.)
Hello? Yes, Mother...Pat's here. No, but I'm going to
this afternoon...I won't lose either of the lenses...
Really, Mother, I'm getting them insured today...Yes,
of course...Julia? No, I haven't heard from her. Why?
...Oh.

(Pat is trying to hear the conversation.
Carole covers the mouthpiece with her hand.)
Julia disappeared again several days ago and finally
marched back into the house this morning without batting
an eyelash.

(uncovers hand)
What? No, I was telling Pat about...what? No, he's
not home...

(Pat motions wildly as David walks in)
Wait, he's just come in...yes, I will, Mother, yes,
the contact lense insurance, yes...alright, I'll call
you this afternoon. Yes. Goodbye.

Pat

Hello, David.

David

(Very well dressed, business-like, carrying
an attache case and small suitcase)
How charming you ladies look this morning.

Pat

So whose fault is that?

David

Not mine. We feed you, we clothe you, we impregnate you--but we don't drape the mirrors with black crepe.

Pat

How clever. Where did you go this trip?

David

Are you really interested, Pat, or are you being nosy?

Carole

David, don't be so fresh at 10:30 in the morning.

David

(carefully appraising both of them)
At 10:30 a.m. in the office my desk is cleared of the morning's mail and I'm juggling two competitive accounts in two adjoining conference rooms. And it might interest you to know,

(to Carole)
the conference rooms are being shifted temporarily to Europe.

(His tone changes, becomes softer, hopeful)
Will you come?

Pat

Europe? How wonderful! Newspapers instead of toilet paper. Running bowels instead of running water...

David

People instead of puppets. Thought instead of "think" signs.

Carole

(quietly)
When are you leaving, David?

David

(just as quietly)
Next Monday.

(Because he thinks he senses Carole's acceptance, he becomes exuberant)
 Look, we'll throw a few things into a suitcase and buy everything else we need in London. I may go into partnership with the ad man who practically has an agency in every large European city. I've got the cash, he's got the accounts. We'll live like King and Queen, and maybe prince or princess, until the deal is completed and then maybe we'll buy a small, secluded villa in Greece or Italy, near the Adriatic, and we'll take trips to Jerusalem and Morocco and Moscow, and...

Carole

You mean you want to live in Europe?

Pat

How quaint!

David

(deflated)
 Yes, for awhile.

Carole

But how could I possibly leave?

David

What's here to keep you?

Carole: Ah, no, David. ...

My family is here, David. And besides, the new den furniture is supposed to be delivered next week. And all those pretty knitted things my aunts made me for the baby. How could we leave those behind? And...

(hesitates, stumbles over the words)
 since Daddy...went away...Mother has no one...

Pat

(stands up)
 Well, have a nice trip, David. Got to go now. Have to do the breakfast dishes.

Carole

(also stands)
I'll see you out.
(walks past David chattering)
Did you hear that Lillian shut herself into her room
again and refuses to eat anything at all...
(Voices trail off into the shadows)

David

(Stands there, looks toward audience,
picks up phone, dials)
...Hello? It's David. There's no change in plans.
I'll be in London and Paris for two weeks. I'll
meet you in Venice on the 18th. Travel light...
Yes, I will--we will...
(Light begins to dim on phone conversation,
remaining only on group at altar)
Goodbye until the 18th. Goodbye...Julia...

Voice

And all knowledge is vain save when there is work
And all work is empty save when there is love.

(The relatives break out into applause
as the curtain descends slowly)

CURTAIN